WHEN BOYS WERE MEN

By JOHN HABBERTON,
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CHAPTER I.
JACKET AND SPUR.

FEW years ago, when war was the most active of American industries and the supply of men and material was never equal to the demand, my friend, Charley Brainard, and I, with a lot of other Summerton boys, joined a militia regiment which had been hastily called to the front. Not one of us was killed, and at the end of our three months' term of service the stupidest of us knew more about military life and duty than any of our officers when we first took the field, so several of us thought it our duty to re-enter the army and help save the nation.

We knew exactly how to do it; we knew almost everything in those days, for the youngest of us was fully 18 years of age, and one was almost 20. On being mustered out of the militia service we were to enlist in the Thirty-eighth cavalry, a regiment then being formed about a veteran battalion of troopers near whom we had camped and whom we greatly admired. No more tramping for us, with a musket on one shoulder and a knapsack on both, while the nation was willing to provide horses for such of its defenders as knew how to ride!

Immediately after enlisting we were to go to recruiting. The government was begging for men and, with state and local authorities, was offering large cash bounties by way of persuasion. We would do all we could to help the government to increase the army; we would also do all we could for ourselves while recruiting, for at that time and during the remainder of the civil war the only way to become a commissioned officer in a new regiment was to persuade some men to enlist and then see carefully to it that they were mustered into the service. Although there was no law defining this method, there was a general understanding which was fairly lived up to by the authorities. A man who could "raise" 50 recruits might feel assured of a captain's commission, 30 would secure a first lieutenancy and 20 a second lieutenancy. Any one who could persuade half a dozen men to enlist could become a sergeant, a position not to be despised in a fighting regiment could the sergeant himself succeed in not being shot, for after a regiment got to fighting the officers who were killed or otherwise disposed of were replaced by deserving noncommissioned officers.

I was so sure of becoming a lieutenant that I had myself measured for an officer's uniform before I ceased to be a private in the Ninety-ninth militia. Had not 27 members of our company promised to enlist under me if I would enter the Thirty-eighth cavalry? They did it with their eyes open, for all of them had seen what there was of the Thirty-eighth and they admired it as much as I. Their willingness to serve under me did not imply that they regarded me as a military genius or a born leader of men. It meant only that my father's little farm, at the edge of our town, contained the largest assortment of fruit trees in all Summerton, that I had never said "No" to any acquaintance who longed for apples, pears, cherries or plums, and that small boys have large memories. Besides, my cousin May, who had always lived with us, was greatly admired by all the boys whom I knew, and it had long been the fashion to be obliging to me because I was the cousin of so nice a girl.

I was not the only Summerton aspirant to a commission. My special friend, Charley Brainard, was willing to be sergeant, or even corporal, under me, but there was Phil Hamilton, a First regiment (militia) man, who had left his old regiment only because he had to study in Europe for two years, and he joined the Summerton company of the Ninety-ninth militia merely because his old regiment had not chanced to be called out, and he wanted to see something of field service. Phil was much the richest young man in town. He was also the handsomest, which really is a great deal to say to any one who chances to know Summerton. His mustache was large enough for a major general. He owned at least 20 walking sticks and twice as many scarfpins, and all the girls were said to be dying for him.

Then there was Cloyne, confidential clerk of the lumber company. He, too, was a handsome fellow, and he had been a cavalry soldier in the British army. He wanted to raise recruits and get a commission. Indeed, both he and Hamilton had seen the prospective colonel of the Thirty-eighth and had so greatly impressed that gentleman as to elicit the statement that he would be greatly disappointed if they did not become officers of his and perhaps succeed him should the fortunes of war carry him out of the service.

So we three formed an amicable partnership to raise a company, of which Hamilton was to be captain, Cloyne first lieutenant and I the second lieutenant.

"To show the other boys that we are dead in earnest," said Hamilton, "there being a lot of trickery and underhand work in the recruiting business, let us all enlist as private soldiers in the Thirty-eighth before we begin business, so our men may feel sure that we are in the service to stay. There is quite a lot of money offered in the form of bounties to recruits. It amounts to several hundred dollars per man. Instead of pocketing it, let us divide it among the men who enlist with us. That ought to give us some advantage over other recruiting officers."

We agreed to follow Phil's advice. Brainard offered to use his bounty in the same way, although he did not expect to be an officer. He wanted to become a minister after the war ended, and he said he didn't wish to expose himself to any temptation that might alienate him from his purpose.

We four enlisted together at the regiment's recruiting headquarters in

"Don't be dismal, Jack."

New York, but Brainard, who hurried back home to see his sick mother, did not reach the medical examiner as soon as we. After Hamilton, Cloyne and I had been accepted and sworn into service we spent a pleasant hour or two at the regiment's recruiting headquarters chatting with the officer in charge, who was to be major of one of the regiment's two new battalions. In the course of time Brainard crept in, looking so dismal that I at once asked him whether his mother was much worse.

"That isn't the trouble," said he. "The surgeon has rejected me. He says I'm under the regulation height and too slight for service anyway."

Suddenly the whole world looked dark to me. Brainard was my dearest friend, and my cousin May was very fond of him, although Phil Hamilton—handsome, rich, stylish Phil—was one of her most devoted admirers. The idea of going to the war again, and for three years, without Brainard being where I could see him every day was too dreadful to be thought of. My feelings must have got into my face, for Brainard put on a ghost of a smile and said:

"Don't be dismal, Jack, for now you'll have the chance to do all the fighting for both of us."

This ought to have comforted my patriotic soul, but it didn't. I was so disloyal to my new vows as to declare that if Brainard was not allowed to enter the Thirty-eighth I wouldn't go either. I would do all in my power to raise men to defend the Union, but afterward I would run away, and Brainard and I would go to some other state and enlist together, where Charley's smallness of stature might not be against him.

But this resolution did not cheer Brainard any, and he felt worse an hour later when the three of us who had passed the mustering officer were looking at one another in new cavalry uniforms, while he was in civilian's dress. He felt still worse when we all went back to Summerton and took supper together at our house, for my cousin May noticed him scarcely at all, but was very agreeable to Hamilton.

The next day, by special permission of the major, Hamilton, Cloyne and I opened a recruiting office at Summerton. Brainard attached himself to us as a sort of civilian aid. He said if he wasn't to be a soldier and fight there was the more reason why he should try to persuade other men to enlist. I immediately notified my 27 men that the roll was ready for them to sign. Hamilton and Cloyne had previously looked at my list and assured me that they would not accept any of these men without specially crediting them to me.

But somehow none of them made haste to sign. Some had heard that larger bounties were being offered in other towns or states, so they were going to look about carefully and do the best they could for themselves; others had themselves seen the cavalry major and obtained promises of commissions if they would raise men; still others had heard that so many men were enlisting from day to day that wages for work at home were going to be much better. Several had spent their final pay from the Ninety-ninth for drink and been picked up, enlisted and mustered for other regiments before they became sober.

Well, to make a long story short, not one of the 27 did I ever secure for the cavalry. Hamilton tried to comfort me by crediting me with Cruse and Whyde, two of our militia comrades who declared they would not have reenlisted had it not been for me; but, as Cruse's parents refused to sign the certificate necessary in the case of minors who enlisted, Cruse was released from his promise. Whyde went swimming one day in water too deep for him and was buried three days later with such military honors as Summerton could extemporize.

For the week after my re-enlistment my heart was as heavy as if it had been filled with bullets. No recruits; no chance of a commission; worse than all, no prospect of having Brainard with me during the three years to come. I was too downhearted to notice that Hamilton and Cloyne were not in their usual spirits, but one day, as the three of us sat in the vacant store in which we had our recruiting office and stared gloomily at the roll which was still blank except for our own names, Brainard came in, looked at us and said abruptly:

"If you fellows don't get your spirits up in some way, you'll never find the government any soldiers, and you won't be fit to be soldiers yourselves."

The looks that were fixed upon him quickly by three pairs of angry eyes ought to have scorched him and made him shrivel. But they didn't, for he went on:

"You haven't got anybody by sitting here or strutting around the village. Why don't you go about everywhere and talk your best? Why, there's Mick McTwyny, a village rowdy, who's working for a sergeant's position in the same regiment—he's enlisted seven men out of the fire engine company alone!"

"Mick McTwyny!" exclaimed Cloyne, springing to his feet.

"That ignorant ruffian?" shouted Hamilton, also rising hastily. "Has he the impudence to want to be a sergeant in our regiment—perhaps our very company?"

"Yes," said Brainard, "and he'll be one, too, if he keeps on as he's begun."

I didn't say much; I couldn't. A whole dictionary could scarcely have supplied words to express what I felt. For awhile, as I imagined Mick in camp in a sergeant's uniform and myself a private in the same company and subject to his orders, I wished it had been I instead of poor Whyde who had been drowned. Hamilton and Cloyne began to pace the floor like tigers in a cage. Suddenly Hamilton stopped and exclaimed:

"There's but one way out of it. We must get more men at any cost. I'll have a handbill printed at once and circulated throughout the county saying that larger bounties will be paid at this office than at any other in the United States. 'Twill cost all the money and property I have, I suppose, but I'd rather lose my last dollar than go out again in the ranks with a beast like Mick McTwyny in authority over me."

"I'll distribute your handbills," said Brainard.

That boy's faculty for seeing what ought to be done always persisted in cropping out just when I wasn't in condition to see anything whatever. Pretty soon, however, the old worry about soldiering under Mick McTwyny and of being three years without Brainard's society came back to me, fully prepared to stay and make itself disagreeable.

I don't know how I should have lived through those days if it hadn't been for my saber and spurs and the chance to display them on horseback. Arms were not given out at recruiting stations. We were told, when we received our uniforms, we would have to wait until we reached the regiment for sabers, revolvers, carbines and ammunition, but I learned that there was no law against a soldier purchasing for himself such arms as his branch of the service used, so I bought a saber and belt and took great comfort from the clank of the saber as I dragged it after me in dismounted cavalry fashion. Then I bought a pair of spurs, and as my father lent me a horse with which to ride about to look for recruits, I had the pleasure of feeling that I was the first cavalry soldier that had been seen in our county since the Revolutionary

I went head first over his shoulders.

war ended. I enjoyed my spurs, too, after I learned not to strike their teeth into my trousers legs. Our horse Rover did not agree with me. For several years I had found him entirely trustworthy under the saddle, but one day when I was approaching a country store in front of which stood several men, among whom I hoped to find at least one recruit, I gave Rover the spurs so as to dash up to the group in fine style and make them fall to admiring the cavalry service. Rover had never before felt a spur, and as he was a thoughtful, sagacious animal, he stopped short, turned his head and looked at his sides to see what had caused the new sensation.

"Get up, Rover!" said I. He resumed the gentle pace at which he had been traveling, but we were now only a few rods from the store, so I again used the spurs. Rover bounded wildly forward. Then he reared his hind quarters high in the air. I went head first over his shoulders, neck and ears, and almost before I knew what had happened I was on my face and breast in a disgusting puddle such as is always found by the pump in front of a country store. At the same time I heard a chorus of hard laughter, and as I picked myself up and rubbed the mud from my face a man in the crowd drawled:

"That hoss 'pears to be a rebel sympathizer, colonel."

I lost all interest in the war for a few moments; being called "colonel" didn't comfort me at all. I didn't ask any one to join the Thirty-eighth. I merely picked up my cap, mounted Rover and went on as if my errand would carry me farther. Even then my humiliation was not complete, for some one shouted:

"Hadn't ye better take yer frog sticker with ye?"

I looked back and saw one of the men with my saber in his hand. It had fallen from the scabbard as I went down. As I rode back to get it the man who held it was trying the edge with his thumb.

"That won't make no reb feel unhappy," said the fellow as he handed me the weapon. "It's got an edge like the back of a hoe."

I sheathed the sword and passed on without even saying "Thank you." I rode until I reached a bit of wooded land. There I dismounted, removed my spurs and buried them in the hollow of a rotten stump, where I found them after the war ended. They hang in my bedroom now to give me a friendly warning whenever I am tempted to put on airs about anything.

CHAPTER II.
THE UNEXPECTED, WHICH FREQUENTLY HAPPENS.

RECRUITING at Summerton went on slowly in spite of our new efforts and of Phil Hamilton's money. There were many reasons for the lack of recruits, and each new reason as we were brought face to face with it proved depressing. First, it became evident that all of our fellow townsmen who really wanted to go to the war had already enlisted. Again, offers of bounties had increased so rapidly that men who looked at soldiering as a mere matter of hire and pay were waiting for higher offers to come.

Besides, the old patriotic enthusiasm which had caused men to enlist at the first notice of a new call for volunteers had entirely disappeared, perhaps because an end had been put to the early impression that the war would be only a sort of picnic, ending in the speedy suppression of southern malcontents. Worse still, increasing taxation was causing a number of the earlier hot blooded patriots to become very cool and conservative and wonder whether the north hadn't perhaps been too hasty and whether the disagreement might not better be settled by words than bullets.

Yet none of these depressing influences seemed to affect the class of men among whom Mick McTwyny was working, for Mick's list had crept along until he had a full dozen of men enlisted and sworn in. They were the 12 worst characters of Summerton, and the natives rejoiced to learn that they were to go where they might be effectively killed. I had my doubts as to their value to the Union cause, although Cloyne said they would be as useful as better men in the work of stopping bullets and that a barroom loafer often fought better than an accomplished gentleman.

As for Hamilton, Cloyne and me, we got less than a dozen men between us in the three weeks in which we worked at Summerton and its vicinity. Another personal discouragement slowly worked its way after each trip that any of us made to headquarters in the city. We found at the major's office from time to time about 25 quite fine fellows, all of whom were trying to get recruits, all hoping or expecting to be made officers, yet the entire number of commissions, including the major's own, could be but 13 to the battalion. How were the conflicting claims to be adjusted and by whom? I asked Cloyne this question, and he replied sadly:

"There'll be no claims to adjust unless the other claimants are getting more recruits than we."

It seemed he was right. If Hamilton's wild offer could not bring men to our office, how were poorer men to secure recruits? Yet Mick McTwyny—ah, there was a mysterious, provoking, enraging, affrighting puzzle!

When I hadn't my own disappointments in mind, I couldn't help worrying over affairs at home. My father and mother grew more and more silent. Little Ned complained that there was no one to play with him, and my cousin May was becoming more deeply interested in Hamilton and Brainard. Which she liked best I could not discover—probably because May herself did not know. She wasn't old enough to know. She treated Brainard as a schoolboy friend and Hamilton as an adult and gentleman. She was right in both cases, but I couldn't help seeing that both of my comrades were very fond of her, and I feared that when the time for parting came one of them would have to suffer greatly. Which would it be? I could not for the life of me tell for which I would feel worst should he be the least favored.

One day word came by mail that the major would like to see all of us at headquarters the next day about noon if entirely convenient to us.

"That looks as if we were to have commissions in spite of our small success at recruiting," said Hamilton. "Officers aren't in the habit of saying 'entirely convenient' to privates when they've any orders to give. Between ourselves, I've been asking my father to use a little family and political influence with the governor to get us commissions, either in our own regiment or elsewhere, and this may be the outcome of it."

"More power to his elbow then," said Cloyne, "if it isn't."

Somehow we all were more hopeful for the remainder of the day, and I would have felt entirely cheerful were it not for the thought that whether officer or private I should still be deprived of Brainard's companionship for three years.

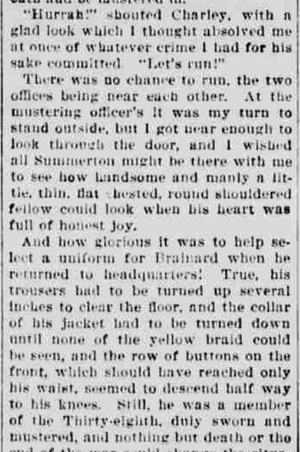
Suddenly there came to my mind a plan which was irregular and shocking, yet which made me wildly gleeful in an instant. The medical examiner had to see daily hundreds of different recruits of all ages, sizes and differences of appearance. His memory certainly could not recall Brainard's appearance were he again to see his name. Suppose I were to enroll Brainard again, take him to headquarters, have his name put on the day's list of recruits to go before the surgeon and then, before that functionary were reached, substitute myself for Brainard in the squad, answer to his name when the surgeon called for him and be examined in his stead? Then Brainard could go on with the new squad, none of whom would know us apart, to the mustering officer and be sworn in.

The plan looked deceitful enough to appear about as bad as treason, but I was equal to any wildness for the sake of having my old chum in the army with me. I did not tell Brainard the whole of it, but I asked him to let me enroll him again and see if the surgeon might not find him a little taller and stouter than before. The poor fellow was willing, but he had not much hope.

Brainard and I hurried to headquarters very early the next morning. I had heard that the old sergeant who always was on duty there would do anything for $5, so I took him aside, told him of my plan and offered him a $10 bill to help me through. I was about to explain further how good a soldier Brainard had been and how much more useful I would be to my country if I could have my old friend with me, but the veteran scoundrel cut me short with

"That'll do. The $10 is explanation enough."

Then he made out the day's list, which didn't take long, as there were only three recruits besides Charley. He explained to me that with Brainard's name on the list he was giving my height, age and particulars of personal appearance. Then he told me to hurry myself into civilian's dress. I had not such clothing in town, but from some cast off coats and trousers at head-



Charley smiled sadly and leaned against a doorcasing.

quarters I selected a suit, and away we went, Brainard walking beside me. When we reached the examiner's office I asked Brainard to wait outside a few moments while I could speak a few words with the surgeon, with whom I thought I might have some influence. Charley smiled sadly and leaned against a doorcasing, while I entered with my heart beating so violently that I feared it might burst before the surgeon could examine it. At last came the call:

"Charles Brainard!"

"Here!" I shouted.

The surgeon looked at the list and then at me, at which I began to tremble guiltily and wondered how soon I would be shot or hanged after discovery. But the surgeon went on with his examination, exactly as he had done three weeks before, and then he marked the list and gave it to the sergeant with the words:

"All accepted."

The sergeant dug his fist into my ribs as we passed out. His fist was big, and he used it with thoughtless vigor, but I imagined there was more more force in a similar familiarity bestowed upon Brainard as we rejoined him, and the old sergeant said:

"Come along."

"Won't he even see me?" asked Charley pitifully, as we marched toward the mustering officer's quarters.

"He's changed his mind about you," I explained. "All you now need, to be a soldier once more, is to take the oath and be mustered in."

"Hurrah!" shouted Charley, with a glad look which I thought absolved me at once of whatever crime I had for his sake committed. "Let's run!"

There was no chance to run, the two offices being near each other. At the mustering officer's it was my turn to stand outside, but I got near enough to look through the door, and I wished all Summerton might be there with me to see how handsome and manly a little, thin, flat chested, round shouldered fellow could look when his heart was full of honest joy.

And how glorious it was to help select a uniform for Brainard when he returned to headquarters! True, his trousers had to be turned up several inches to clear the floor, and the collar of his jacket had to be turned down until none of the yellow braid could be seen, and the row of buttons on the front, which should have reached only his waist, seemed to descend half way to his knees. Still, he was a member of the Thirty-eighth, duly sworn and mustered, and nothing but death or the end of the war could change the situation. How I did wish my brilliant plan had occurred to me sooner, so that Hamilton's father might have used his influence with the governor in Brainard's favor also!

After I got into my uniform again we sat and talked and planned as happily as if we were going into possession of unexpected riches instead of to war and possible death. The wicked old sergeant strolled to and fro in front of us, smoking his pipe and eying us strangely. Suddenly he stopped in front of us and blurted out:

"I never struck a couple like you before. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll take you both out and get you drunk at my own expense."

We declined, with thanks, explaining that we expected to be quite busy for an hour or two, as we had to make some purchases and I had an engagement at noon with the major, whom I didn't like to disappoint.

"Oh, no; of course not," he replied, with a grim grin. "I wouldn't keep the major waiting for anything if I were you. But, say"—here he drew me aside and pressed something into my hand—"you'll take back your $10 anyhow."

I tried to decline, but he said that if I didn't take the money he'd light his pipe with it. He insisted that he already had pay enough for his trouble, and when I replied that I couldn't see how, he called me a fool. He put a lot of uncomplimentary adjectives in front of the "f-----."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

EVEN A KISS BY MAIL IS BETTER.

"I can't imagine anything more unsatisfactory than a meal at our boarding house," said the chronic kicker.

"No?" replied the impressionable young man. "Evidently you never got a kiss from your best girl over the telephone."—Philadelphia Press.

DISCOURAGING CIRCUMSTANCES.

Tramp (in the country)—Yes, I once rode a bicycle, but I had ter give it up.

Cyclist—Why.

Tramp—Well, yer see, the owner was comin' down the road behind me, and the policeman had a rope stretched across the road in front.—Chums.

AN EXCUSE FOR OOM PAUL.

An old Scotch gamekeeper was a great admirer of Paul Kruger. His master told him that Kruger had fled and left Mrs. Kruger behind him, adding, "Well, what do you think of Mr. Kruger now?" The gamekeeper, in a sad and sympathetic voice, replied, "Eh, sir, but mony a man would be glad to do the same."—Exchange.

SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—Billy Bones, an old sea dog, much addicted to rum, lodges at Admiral Benbow inn.

CHAPTER II.—Stranger, called "Black Dog," meets Bones; an interview ends in fight and disappearance of stranger. Bones suffers apoplectic stroke.

CHAPTER III.—Blind beggar comes to inn, presses something in Bones' hand and leaves. "Ten o'clock!" Bones cries, "Six hours. We'll do them yet;" at which moment he is struck dead by apoplexy.

CHAPTER IV.—Near Bones' body is found a little round paper, blackened on one side, on the other the words: "You have till ten to-night." Gold is found in Bones' sea chest, and an oilskin packet. Flight taken from inn.

CHAPTER V.—Blind man (Pew) with companions attack the inn. Chagrined at not finding "Flint's list," the scoundrels scatter. Blind Pew is run down and killed by a horse.

CHAPTER VI.—Young Hawkins takes packet to Dr. Livesey, who with Squire Trelawney opens it and finds minute directions for finding of vast treasure.

CHAPTER VII.—Trelawney fits up expedition to seek treasure.

CHAPTER VIII.—Jim Hawkins meets Black Dog at John Silver's inn. Black Dog runs away, and Silver avows ignorance of his identity.

CHAPTER IX.—Ship's captain thinks some things on board somewhat singular and asks to have certain precautions taken, among which are the storing of the powder and arms astern and giving the doctor and his friends berths beside the cabin.

CHAPTER X.—"Hispaniola" begins her voyage. Hawkins climbs into apple barrel and overhears plans of treachery on foot among the crew.

CHAPTER XI.—Plot foiled by Silver, ship's cook) provides for the strike for possession of the treasure immediately it is gotten aboard. Cry of "Land ho!" heard.

CHAPTER XII.—Hawkins tells of Silver's treachery to Livesey, Trelawney and Capt. Smollett, who hold a council of war.

CHAPTER XIII.—Mutiny begins to show in restlessness of men, and captain decides to give the men an afternoon ashore. Jim Hawkins slips off with them, but on the island gives them the slip.

CHAPTER XIV.—From cover Jim sees Silver kill one of the honest hands, and also learns of the murder of another in another part of the island and runs from the scene.

CHAPTER XV.—Jim meets Ben Gunn, a marooned sailor who had lived on island three years. Report of a cannon is heard. Both run for it, when they see in the wood the union jack.

CHAPTER XVI.—Hunter and the doctor go ashore in a jolly-boat, discover a block-house within a stockade and decide to picket it. Pitiful party is joined by Gray, a mutineer, and the ship left with the five remaining mutineers on board.

CHAPTER XVII.—Jolly-boat starts on last trip to shore overloaded with provisions. Mutineers on ship man the gun. Trelawney picks off one of the gunners. Cannon ball passes over boat, which sinks and leaves party to wade ashore. Buccaneers heard near by in the wood.

CHAPTER XVIII.—Fight with buccaneers results in one killed on each side. Faithful party gain the stockade and run up the British colors.

CHAPTER XIX.—Jim seeing the colors knows he is near friends and, leaving Ben Gunn, climbs into the stockade.

CHAPTER XX.—Silver, under flag of truce, makes overtures for chart to get the treasure by, but fails.

CHAPTER XXI.—Buccaneers attack stockade, are worsted, leaving five dead behind. The faithful party loses two, and Capt. Smollett wounded.

CHAPTER XXII.—Doctor sets out to find Ben Gunn. Jim slips off to seek boat Ben Gunn had built, and decides to cut "Hispaniola," now flying the jolly roger, adrift.

CHAPTER XXIII.—Schooner now manned by only two of the pirates, and they in a drunken brawl, is cut from anchor. Jim then, from sheer exhaustion, falls asleep in bottom of coracle.

CHAPTER XXIV.—Awaking Jim sees the "Hispaniola" helplessly drifting, and by a great effort reaches her and leaps, catching the jibboom.

CHAPTER XXV.—Jim finds one of the mutineers (O'Brien) dead, killed by Hands, and Hands, the only survivor on board, severely wounded; decides to reach the ship in North inlet.

CHAPTER XXVI.—Hands manages to secure a dirk. Jim discovers the treachery and escapes up a mast, to which he is pinned by Hands throwing his dirk. Jim fires his pistol.

CHAPTER XXVII.—Hands pierced by a bullet falls into the water and sinks. Jim makes fast the vessel and returns by moonlight to stockade, to discover he has fallen into the hostile camp.

PART VI.
CAPTAIN SILVER

CHAPTER XXVIII.
IN THE ENEMY'S CAMP.

The red glare of the torch, lighting up the interior of the block-house, showed me the worst of my apprehensions realized. The pirates were in possession of the house and stores; there was a cask of cognac, there were the pork and bread, as before; and, what tenfold increased my horror, not a sign of any prisoner. I could only judge that all had perished, and my heart smote me sorely that I had not been there to perish with them.

There were six of the buccaneers, all told; not another man was left alive. Five of them were on their feet, flushed and swollen, suddenly called out of the first sleep of drunkenness. The sixth had only risen upon his elbow; he was deadly pale, and the blood-stained bandage round his head told that he had recently been wounded, and still more recently dressed. I remembered the man who had been shot and had run back among the woods in the great attack, and doubted not that this was he.

The parrot sat, preening her plumage, on Long John's shoulder. He himself, I thought, looked somewhat paler and more stern than I was used to. He still wore his fine broadcloth suit in which he had fulfilled his mission, but it was bitterly the worse for wear, daubed with clay and torn with the sharp briars of the wood.

"So," said he, "here's Jim Hawkins, shiver my timbers! dropped in, like, eh? Well, come, I take that friendly."

And thereupon he sat down across the brandy-cask, and began to fill a pipe.

"Give me the loan of a link, Dick," said he; and then, when he had a good light, "that'll do, lad," he added, "stick the glim in the wood heap; and you, gentlemen, bring yourselves to!—you needn't stand up for Hawkins; he'll excuse you, you may lay to that. And so, Jim"—stopping the tobacco—"here you are, and quite a pleasant surprise for poor old John. I see you were smart when first I set my eyes on you; but this here gets away from me clean, it do."

To all this, as may be well supposed, I made no answer. They had set me with my back against the wall; and I stood there, looking Silver in the face, pluckily enough, I hope, to all outward appearance, but with black despair in my heart.

Silver took a whiff or two of his pipe with great composure, and then ran on again.

"Now, you see, Jim, so be as you are here," says he, "I'll give you a piece of my mind. I've always liked you, I have, for a lad of spirit, and the picter of my own self when I was young and handsome. I always wanted you to fine and take your share, and die a gentleman, and now, my cock, you've got to. Cap'n Smollett's a fine seaman, as I'll own up to any day, but stiff on discipline. 'Dooty is dooty,' says he, and right he is. Just you keep clear of the cap'n. The doctor himself is gone dead again you—'ungrateful scamp' was what he said; and the short and the long of the whole story is about here; you can't go back to your own lot, for they won't have you; and, without you start a third ship's company all by yourself, which might be lonely, you'll have to fine with Cap'n Silver."

So far so good. My friends, then, were still alive, and though I partly believed the truth of Silver's statement, that the cabin party were incensed at me for my desertion, I was more relieved than distressed by what I heard.

"I don't say nothing as to your being in our hands," continued Silver, "though there you are, and you may lay to it. I'm all for argyment; I never seen good come out o' threatening. If you like the service, well, you'll jine; and if you don't, Jim, you're free to answer no—free and welcome, shipmate; and if fairer can be said by mortal seaman, shiver my sides!"

"Am I to answer, then?" I asked, with a very tremulous voice. Through all this sneering talk, I was made to feel the threat of death that overhung me, and my cheeks burned and my heart beat painfully in my breast.

"Lad," said Silver, "no one's a-pressing of you. Take your bearings. None of us won't hurry you, mate; time goes so pleasant in your company, you see."

"Well," says I, growing a bit bolder, "if I'm to choose, I declare I have a right to know what's what, and why you're here, and where my friends are."

"Wot's wot?" repeated one of the buccaneers, in a deep growl. "Ah, he'd be a lucky one as knowed that!"

"You'll perhaps batten down your hatches till you're spoke, my friend," cried Silver, truculently, to this speaker. "Yesterday morning, Mr. Hawkins," said he, "in the dog-watch, down came Dr. Livesey with a flag of truce. Says he: 'Cap'n Silver, you're sold out. Ship's gone!' Well, maybe we'd been taking a glass, and a song to help it round. I won't say no. Leastways none of us had looked out. We looked out, and, by thunder! the old ship was gone. I never seen a pack o' fools look fishier; and you may lay to that, if I tells you that I looked the fishiest. 'Well,' says the doctor, 'let's bargain.' We bargained, him and I, and here we are; stores, brandy, block-house, the fire-wood you was thoughtful enough to cut, and, in a manner of speaking, the whole blessed boat, from cross-trees to keelson. As for them, they've tramped; I don't know where's they are."

He drew again quietly at his pipe.

"And lest you should take it into that head of yours," he went on, "that you was included in the treaty, here's the last words that was said: 'How many are you?' says I, 'to leave?' 'Four,' says he—'four and one of us wounded. As for the boy, I don't know where he is, confound him,' says he, 'nor I don't much care. We're about sick of him.' These was his words."

"Is that all?" I asked.

"Well, it's all you're to hear, my son," returned Silver.

"And now I am to choose?"

"And now you are to choose, and you may lay to that," said Silver.

"Well," said I, "I am not such a fool but I know pretty well what I have to look for. Let the worst come to the worst, it's little I care. I've seen too many die since I fell in with you. But there's a thing or two I have to tell you," I said, and by this time I was quite excited; "and the first is this: Here you are in the bad way; ship lost, treasure lost, men lost; your whole business gone to wreck; and if you want to know who did it—it was I! I was in the apple barrel the night you sighted land, and I heard you, John, and you, Dick Johnson, and Hands, who is now at the bottom of the sea, and told every word you said before the hour was out. And as for the schooner, it was I who cut her cable, and it was I who killed the men you had aboard of her, and it was I who brought her where you'll never see her more, not one of you. The laugh's on my side; I've had the top of this business from the first; I no more fear you than I fear a fly. Kill me, if you please, or spare me. But one thing I'll say, and no more; if you spare me, by-gones are by-gones, and, when you fellows are in court for piracy, I'll save you all I can. It is for you to choose. Kill another and do yourself no good, or spare me and keep a witness to save you from the gallows."

I stopped, for, I tell you, I was out of breath, and, to my wonder, not a man of them moved, but all sat staring at me like as many sheep. And while they were still staring, I broke out again:

"And now, Mr. Silver," I said, "I believe you're the best man here, and if things go to the worst, I'll take it kind of you to let the doctor know the way I took it."

"I'll hear it in mind," said Silver, with an accent so curious that I could not, for the life of me, decide whether he were laughing at my request or had been favorably affected by my courage.

"I'll put one to that," cried the old mahogany-faced seaman—Morgan by name—whom I had seen in Long John's public house upon the quays of Bristol. "It was him that knowed Black Dog."

"Well, and see here," added the sea-cook. "I'll put another again to that, by thunder! For it was the same boy that faked the chart from Billy Bones. First and last we've split upon Jim Hawkins!"

"Then here goes!" said Morgan, with an oath.

And he sprang up, drawing his knife as if he had been twenty.

"Avast, there!" cried Silver. "Who are you, Tom Morgan? Maybe you thought you were captain here, perhaps. By the powers, I 'll teach you better! Cross me, and you'll go where many a good man's gone before you first and last, these 20 year back—some to the yard-arm, shiver my sides! and some by the board, and all to feed the fishes. There's never a man looked me between the eyes and seen a good day a'terward, Tom Morgan, you may lay to that."

Morgan paused; but a hoarse murmur rose from the others.

"Tom's right," said one.

"I stood hazing long enough from one," added another. "I'll be hanged if I'll be hazed by you, John Silver."

"Did any of you gentlemen want to have it out with me?" roared Silver, bending far forward from his position on the keg, with his pipe still glowing in his right hand. "Put a name on what you're at; you ain't dumb, I reckon. Him that wants shall get it. Have I lived this many years, and a son of a rum puncheon cock his hat athwart my hawse at the latter end of it? You know the way; you're

"Then here goes," said Morgan, with an oath.

all gentlemen of fortune, by your account. Well, I'm ready. Take a cutlass him that dares, and I'll see the color of his inside, crutch and all, before that pipe's empty."

Not a man stirred; not a man answered.

"That's your sort, is it?" he added, returning his pipe to his mouth. "Well, you're a gay lot to look at, anyway. Not much worth to fight, you ain't. P'raps you can understand King George's English. I'm cap'n here by 'lection. I'm cap'n here because I'm the best man by a long sea-mile. You won't fight, as gentlemen o' fortune should; then, by thunder, you'll obey, and you may lay to it! I like that boy, now; and I never seen a better boy than that. He's more of a man than any pair of rats of you in this here house, and what I say is this: Let me see him as'll lay a hand on him—that's what I say, and you may lay to it."

There was a long pause after this. I stood straight up against the wall, my heart still going like a sledge-hammer, but with a ray of hope now shining in my bosom. Silver leaned back against the wall, his arms crossed, his pipe in the corner of his mouth, as calm as though he had been in church; yet his eye kept wandering furtively, and he kept the tail of it on his unruly followers. They on their part drew gradually together toward the far end of the block-house, and the low hiss of their whispering sounded in my ears continuously, like a stream. One after another they would look up, the red light of the torch would fall for a second on their nervous faces; but it was not toward me, it was toward Silver they turned their eyes.

"You seem to have a lot to say," remarked Silver, spitting far into the air. "Pipe up and let me hear it, or lay to."

"Ax your pardon, sir," said one of the men, "you're pretty free with some of the rules; maybe you'll kindly keep an eye upon the rest. This crew's dissatisfied; this crew don't vally bullying a marlinspike; this crew has its rights like other crews, I'll make so free as that; and by your own rules, I take it we can talk together. I ax your pardon, sir, acknowledging you for to be capting at this present; but I claim my right, and steps outside for a council."

And with an elaborate sea-salute, this fellow, a long, ill-looking, yellow-eyed man of five-and-thirty, stepped coolly toward the door and disappeared out of the house. One after another the rest followed his example; each making a salute as he passed; each adding some apology. "According to the rules," said one. "Fo'k's'le council," said Morgan. And so, with one remark or another, all marched out, and left Silver and me alone with the torch.

The sea-cook instantly removed his pipe.

"Now, look here, Jim Hawkins," he said, in a steady whisper, that was no more than audible, "you're within half a plank of death, and what's a long sight worse, of torture. They're going to throw me off. But you mark, I stand by you through thick and thin. I didn't mean to; no, not till you spoke up. I was about desperate to lose that much blunt, and be hanged into the bargain. But I see you was the right sort. I says to myself: You stand by Hawkins, John, and Hawkins'll stand by you. You're his last card, and by the living thunder, John, he's yours! Back to back, says I. You save your witness, and he'll save your neck!"

I began dimly to understand.

"You mean all is lost?" I asked.

"Ay, by gum, I do!" he answered. "Ship gone, neck gone—that's the size of it. Once I looked into that bay, Jim Hawkins, and seen no schooner—well, I'm tough, but gave out. As for that lot and their council, mark me, they're outright fools and cowards. I'll save your life—if so be as I can—from them. But see here, Jim—tit for tat—you save Long John from swinging."

I was bewildered; it seemed a thing so hopeless he was asking—he, the old buccaneer, the ringleader throughout.

"What I can do, that I'll do," I said.

"It's a bargain!" cried Long John. "You speak up plucky, and, by thunder! I've a chance."

He hobbled to the torch, where it stood propped among the firewood, and took a fresh light to his pipe.

"Understand me, Jim," he said, returning. "I've a head on my shoulders, I have. I'm on squire's side, now. I know you've got that ship safe somewheres. How you done it, I don't know;